

**Press Release**  
**Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (Red Tide) Illnesses – Washington County**

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Contacts:

DMR – Who? and What Number?

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Over the weekend of July 5<sup>th</sup> three people from Washington County were hospitalized with symptoms of paralytic shellfish poisoning, also known as red tide poisoning. This occurred several hours after they shared a meal of mussels. Samples of the mussels were highly contaminated with the toxin that causes paralytic shellfish poisoning. All three people were discharged a day after admission, and are expected to fully recover.

Information from the patients indicates that the source of mussels was a rope dangling in the ocean off a pier, and not a mussel bed. The area has been closed for about three weeks to shellfish harvesting because of red tide by the Department of Marine Resources' Toxin Monitoring Program. The mussels were taken by the people for personal use, and none are professional fishermen.

Paralytic shellfish poisoning is a marine biotoxin that is associated with certain types of algae blooms in coastal waters. Bivalve shellfish such as clams, mussels, oysters, and quahogs filter water and eat the toxic algae from the water. High concentrations of the toxin can then cause serious illness or death if eaten by humans.

Although it had been about 30 years since the last report of Mainers with red tide poisoning, the state has seen two incidents in the past year, involving a total of seven people. Both incidents involved people from Washington County consuming mussels harvested for personal use and from mussels growing off from a rope or barrel floating in the ocean in areas closed for shellfish harvesting because of red tide.

These two incidents point out important steps people can take to thoroughly and safely enjoy Maine shellfish:

1. **Purchase shellfish from a certified shellfish dealer.** Their operations undergo rigorous public health screening and auditing.
2. **If harvesting for personal use, make sure the shellfish beds are not closed for red tide.** Check the Department of Marine Resources' website for the latest information on closed areas:  
[http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public\\_health/closures/pspclosures.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public_health/closures/pspclosures.htm)
3. **Do not consume mussels or clams from open waters.** Clam and mussels from open waters are likely to have filtered much more algae-containing water than

those from flats or beds, and therefore will generally have much higher concentrations of toxin.

Symptoms of PSP include tingling and/or numbness of the mouth, face, or neck, muscle weakness, headaches, and nausea. In extreme cases, these symptoms can lead to respiratory failure. Symptoms usually occur within two hours of eating contaminated shellfish. Anyone who has eaten shellfish and experiences these symptoms should seek immediate medical care.

FMI:

Maine Department of Marine Resources Red Tide Closures:

[http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public\\_health/closures/pspclosures.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public_health/closures/pspclosures.htm)

Maine CDC/DHHS Red Tide Information:

[http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/maine\\_cdc\\_red\\_tide\\_information.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/maine_cdc_red_tide_information.htm)

- Northern New England Poison Center Red Tide Information:

[http://www.mmc.org/mmc\\_body.cfm?id=2166](http://www.mmc.org/mmc_body.cfm?id=2166)

or 800-222-1222